

## Beliefs of First Steps

**F**irst Steps is a support and service system designed to improve family capacity to enhance their child's development and learning and to increase the child's participation in family and community life. Participation in First Steps is voluntary and is intended to help families of children with disabilities. The system is built on the following beliefs:

- Families are decision makers and the child's first teacher.
- Effective services are designed around and promote family strengths.
- Effective services are culturally competent.
- Effective services are provided in the context of the child's and family's natural routines.
- Effective services are provided in natural environments.
- Services and supports are individualized.
- Competent providers focus on family competence.
- Early identification and family engagement are critical to early intervention.

Missouri's First Steps system is designed for families of infants and toddlers with disabilities. It is the "first step" to preparing children to enter school and become successful adults.

Families play an integral role in their child's development. The First Steps system provides families the tools they need to help their child be successful.

Contact your local First Steps System Point of Entry (SPOE) office for more information by calling toll free:

**1-866-583-2392**

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# The Missouri First Steps Program

## Who Is Eligible for Services?

Children who are eligible for early intervention services are children between the ages of birth and 36 months who have been determined to either (1) have a diagnosed physical or mental condition associated with developmental disabilities or that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay or disability, such as a very low birth weight child who has experienced intracranial bleeds or asphyxiation, Down Syndrome, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, etc., or (2) be functioning at half the developmental level that would be expected for a child considered to be developing within normal limits and of equal age in one or more of the following areas: cognitive development; communication development; adaptive development; physical development, including vision and hearing; and social or emotional development.

## How Do Families Find Out if Their Child Is Eligible for First Steps?

Families come to First Steps in two ways. Most families are referred to First Steps by doctors, hospital staff, social service agency caseworkers, or the Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program.

Others are “self-referral” parents contacting First Steps directly because they are concerned about their child’s development. Shortly after a referral is made, a **Service Coordinator** will be assigned to your family by the System Point of Entry (SPOE). This person is responsible for coordinating with all the various agencies that will provide services for your child, minimizing “red tape,” and saving your family time, energy, and needless expense. The first thing the SPOE does to help your infant or toddler is to schedule an **initial assessment and evaluation**. This service brings you together with a team of professionals to determine whether or not your child demonstrates a developmental delay or disability that meets the First Steps criteria for eligibility. If your child is found to be eligible for First Steps, your **Service Coordinator** will schedule a meeting for your family with a team of professionals. During the meeting, the team will review the results of the assessment, your concerns and your child’s needs. Outcomes will be identified that best describe your concerns, priorities and the resources related to your child’s development. The team will then determine the services

necessary to meet these outcomes. This information becomes the basis for an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**, a written “road map” or action plan for the services your child and family will receive. The IFSP must be written within 45 days of the referral and reviewed at least every six months as well as annually. It includes the major goals for your child; how your child’s progress will be measured;

what and where services will be provided; when they begin and for how long; methods of payment; and a plan to assist with transitions into, within, and out of First Steps. Your Service Coordinator will work with you to select your child’s service providers, to ensure that your IFSP is implemented, and to ensure that you are satisfied with the services and supports that you are receiving.

